

The  
AQUINO  
MANAGEMENT  
Of The  
PRESIDENCY



Her People's Emissary



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# Foreword

"OURS IS A government that came to power borne on the shoulders of our people; we must, therefore, govern on the basis of that same people power".

These were the very words of President Corazon C. Aquino - words that laid the foundation of the highest office of the land. For six years and four months, her people-powered presidency reflected itself in the very nature of the executive branch and on the implementation of several projects closest to the President's heart; closest, because they touched the warp and woof of our people's aspirations.

To document in part her people-powered presidency, we have compiled this series of volumes titled *The Aquino Management of the Presidency*. The first part of the series attempts to outline the evolution of the support offices and the various management tools and technology employed in the decision-making and decision dissemination processes in the Office of the President. The second part of the series, to which this volume belongs, provides a chronicle of some specific undertakings initiated by the Office of the President which, now, constitute part of the legacies of the Aquino government. The third part of the series is a summation of the Aquino government's performance during its six years in office.

This volume, "Her People's Emissary", outlines the results of the President's quest for international goodwill as well as the meticulous spadework that went



into the preparations for all of the state visits that made such quest possible. This volume also presents the clear contrast between President Aquino's approach to the preparation of her state visits to that of her predecessor's.

This series of volumes, *The Aquino Management of the Presidency*, is by no means a complete coverage of the legacies of the Aquino presidency. Some of those not documented here are contained in materials better covered by other line agencies or academic groups.

Some of President Aquino's legacies, however, will find no archive to preserve them for posterity. One would have to look at the faces and listen to the hearts of the people she touched in order to find them.

**Aniceto M. Sobrepeña**

*Cabinet Secretary*

*and*

*Head, Presidential Management Staff*

*"The greatest benefit of state visits may well be the first-hand knowledge and understanding that each leader acquires of another. For in the last analysis, it is not historic trends or impersonal forces that shape events but peoples as represented by their leaders".*

President Corazon C. Aquino

*Departure Message for China-Hongkong Visit*

*April 14, 1988*





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# Introduction

YELLOW MADONNA. JOAN of Arc. Time Magazine's Woman of the Year for 1986. These were just some of the international accolades bestowed on President Corazon C. Aquino, signs that she had gained world renown as a symbol of democracy. Her phenomenal ascent to power through the peaceful EDSA revolution in February 1986 earned not only for her but for the country as well, the respect and goodwill of the international community.

As a result of her popularity, the President received many invitations for state visits to countries which were more than willing to host her. Some of the approximately 40 invitations she received were accepted, but a lot had to be turned down. The President had to carefully select the invitations to honor as she had to prioritize the demands on her time. Her first and foremost criterion for choosing which countries to visit was that the visit would produce beneficial results for the country.

But she was also well aware of her role as one of the world's symbols and leading proponents of democracy. Thus, her presence in some world events in which the primary reason for her being there was as such.

In her missions abroad, President Aquino took pride in advertising the success of the peaceful EDSA revolution and the courage and unbreakable spirit of

the Filipino people that made it possible; thereby implicitly sharing credit for her newfound role.

This role was clearly emphasized by Prime Minister Michel Rocard of France during the dinner he hosted for President Aquino on July 12, 1989: "Your presence in Paris, on the eve of the 14th of July is, in our eyes, a token of the universality and constant validity of the principles that guide our democracies: the respect of dignity and the promotion of human rights, the furtherance of equality and the safeguard of liberty. You are most highly respected by all my compatriots through your personal courage and your determination in promoting democracy".

President Aquino proved to be a consummate ambassador for the country. The esteem with which the world regarded her was used to great advantage. She forged and strengthened diplomatic relations with other countries she knew would be important partners in the development of the Philippines, as in the case of her having met with practically all the leaders of the so-called economic superpowers.

The President recognized the importance of establishing personal contact with other heads of state to ensure their firm commitment and support to Philippine endeavors. This awareness was vividly captured in a statement she made in her program "Magtanong sa Pangulo" on November 19, 1989: "Ang mahalaga iyong matipon mo lahat itong mga leaders na ito na minsan mong makausap at pagkatapos kung ano man iyong kanilang mga questions maitatanong nila doon sa mga members of my delegation. But over and beyond that, it is the person-to-person contact that is really most helpful and will be, I hope, of an enduring quality".

Also foremost on the President's mind was the provision of encouragement and support to thousands of overseas Filipino workers whom she considered the unsung heroes of Philippine democracy. Hence, invitations to world capitals where there were large Filipino communities merited her consideration. Her schedule of activities for visits to these countries always included a program with overseas Filipinos.

During those programs, she saluted the sacrifice made by her fellow Filipinos in leaving their land of birth to work in a foreign country. She also thanked them for their contribution to the Philippine economy through the remittances of their earnings to their relatives in the Philippines and assured them of the continued concern of the Philippine government for their well-being.

Her statement at St. Margaret's Church to the Filipino community in Hongkong best illustrates her concern for, and gratitude to the migrant workers: "Nasa inyo ang lahat ng dahilan upang taas-noo ninyong ipagmalaki ang inyong gawain, ano man ang inyong gawain, gaano man ito kahamak sa paningin ng iba. Tandaan lamang ninyo na dakila ang lahat ng hanapbuhay. Tandaan din ninyo na hindi lamang ang inyong mga kabiya, mga anak at mga kamag-anak ang magpapasalamat sa sakripisyo na inyong dinaranas, kundi ang buong sambayanang Pilipino. Kayo ay makasisiguro na ang inyong pamahalaan ay gagawin ang lahat para sa inyong ikabubuti".

It was evident that wherever or for whatever reason she may be in a foreign location, the President's focus was on her people's welfare and her country's pursuit of development.

With these main considerations in mind, President Corazon C. Aquino limited her foreign visits to only 16 countries. Though limited in number, the establishment of a set of criteria with which she evaluated her choices guaranteed the substantive quality of each of her state visits.

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# Presidential State Visits

THE PRESIDENT ONCE remarked that she did not want her state visits to be measured in francs, dollars, or any other foreign denomination. Instead, she would rather dwell on the alliances and the friendships that her visits had built and strengthened. In her mind, this would best ensure the continuous cooperation and admiration of the world for the Philippines and the Filipinos.

## **Indonesia And Singapore: ASEAN Ties That Bind**

Singapore and the Republic of Indonesia were the first foreign countries visited by President Aquino. This was not surprising since among the ASEAN countries, Singapore and Indonesia were the first to recognize and express support to her government.

It was only five months after she had assumed office that the President decided to pay her ASEAN neighbors a visit. This was the time when she was still laying the foundations for the newfound democracy in the Philippines. Nevertheless, the President knew that it was about time for the country to emerge and once again be an active member of the family of nations. On her first official visit abroad, the President was able to hit two birds with one stone: she was able to



define to the rest of the world the Aquino administration's policy framework for diplomacy and to reestablish the ASEAN bond of cooperation and friendship.

### **United States Of America: Ensuring Democratic Allies**

As a former colony and student of democracy of the United States of America, the Philippines enters a virtual validation test each time the country's head of state visits the US. The US was one of the few countries twice visited by President Aquino.

The first visit of the President was on September 15-16, 1986 upon the invitation of then President Ronald Reagan. There were two important occasions during the President's visit – her one-on-one meeting with President Reagan and her address to the United States Congress.

President Aquino proved her mettle as the head of government of a newfound democracy by impressing both of her audiences. After her meeting with President Reagan which lasted longer than the scheduled time, President Reagan proudly proclaimed: "I'm bullish about the Philippines. I assured her that all America wants the Philippine democracy to succeed and to prosper and that we'll do what we can to help".

The members of the US Congress, on the other hand, were enthralled. They showed their strong support for her by wearing yellow ties and Cory dolls or yellow roses on their lapels. At the end of her speech, President Aquino was given a sustained and rousing applause which some observers say lasted for about two minutes – the longest the US Congress had given to any foreign dignitary.

At home, her countrymen shed tears of pride upon seeing their President capturing more hearts in America. To some baseball-crazy Americans, Aquino's visit was like "being somewhere between the World Series and the Pope's visit".

The strong support of the US Congress was translated into concrete terms when the US House of Representatives quickly voted for a US\$200 million spe-

cial appropriation for the Philippines. At the same time, outstanding loans payable amounting to US\$90 million were converted into grants for projects to improve agriculture, the delivery of health, education and other social services, and the provision of food aid amounting to US\$32 million.

More importantly, the President's first visit to the US showed that she was in control of the country and could confidently leave it without fear of being overthrown during her absence.

President Aquino's second visit to the US was in November of 1989 when she was invited by President George Bush. Her visit was a whirlwind of activities. On November 7, she went to New York where she pressed the button that rang the ceremonial bell to signal the start of trading at the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). Immediately after doing so, a wall tripper began flashing a welcome message to President Aquino and listing the first stock of the day – the US\$60 million First Philippine Fund or FPF. The President was the first head of state to inaugurate an issue in the history of the NYSE. The initial subscription of US\$60 million shot up to US\$90 million.

Afterwards, the President met the American-Filipino community in New York at the Pierre Hotel. In her speech she encouraged her audience to unite and help each other. She also promoted Philippine-made products by making it a point to refer to her dress as "having been made back home" and encouraged them to patronize Philippine-made products to help their fellow Filipinos. She also invited the businessmen to take a harder look at investments prospects in the Philippines.

On November 8, she flew to Washington for the start of the official program of her state visit. In Washington, the US government's pledge for the Philippine Assistance Program, which had difficulty in appropriation, was restored to US\$200 million by a joint conference committee of the US Congress following her meeting with their leaders.

In formal ceremonies at the White House, President Aquino's overwhelming popularity with the American people and their President was once again brought



to the fore with the following statements from President Bush: "Three years ago when you rang the bell of freedom in Manila, America cheered and rose in awe. And when your words rang from the rafters of our Congress, our leaders stood up and gave you the most thunderous reception given any foreign leader in more than a generation. And just yesterday when you rang the bell on the New York Stock Exchange, the market climbed 26 points. So, the message is simple, from Main Street to Wall Street, America loves the Philippines and America loves Cory Aquino".

By the time the President flew out of Washington, the World Bank had approved a package of US\$605 million in grants and new loan agreements. A Memorandum of Understanding with the USAID granting US\$25 million assistance to the Philippines to support project feasibility studies was also signed.

On November 10, the President was greeted in Dallas by more than 2,000 Filipinos and Americans at JC Penny, one of the largest retail department store chains in North America. At Anatole Hotel's Trinity Hall, a bouyant President Aquino walked through a giant map of Texas into a replica of a Philippine village complete with palm trees, hibiscus garden, waterfalls, lily ponds, nipa huts and lechon and bibingka stalls livened by Texas music and Philippine folk dances. The President was overwhelmed by the "Texas Salute".

Later at a dinner hosted by the JC Penny, the President expressed her appreciation for the reception accorded to her earlier as well as for her host's initiative in promoting Philippine products. She said: "Every Filipino product sold in a foreign market is a fragment of the Filipino dream to be strong again and prosperous. To live in the dignity that befits free men. I can't think of any other people I'd rather have with us making that dream come true than the people of this great state. We are so distant from each other yet so alike in many ways. A gallant Texan gave me the most fitting gift on my first official visit to the United States – the yellow rose of Texas. There are only two countries in the world where the color yellow is a symbol of courage – the Philippines where it stands for the people power revolution and Texas".

President Aquino had come a long way in mastering the art of winning the hearts of foreign people. In the eyes of the many people who gave her warm

reception, she had become a master statesman. She was observed by many as being relaxed and totally confident during the many occasions she addressed various audiences in the United States in 1989. Her candor during her speech at the International Women's Forum held in Dallas particularly illustrates this: "I was suddenly in charge of the whole country like a housewife having the whole house for herself to clean. But it was a bit more complicated . . . some of the members of the military wanted to share my duties as housewife or caretaker of the country. This was, of course, out of the question. They didn't look the part, and only I had been elected President".

Aside from the economic gains achieved from the World Bank and the USAID, the President's second visit to the US once again showed her popularity with the American people and firmly set her in the ranks of world class leaders.

### **Japan: Partners For Progress**

The Philippines had always enjoyed warm and cordial relations with Japan. Through the years, Japan had proven to be a consistent benefactor and partner in the development of the Philippines. This is the primary reason why Japan was the only country thrice visited by President Aquino.

The first visit of the President to Japan in November 1986 laid the groundwork for strengthened RP-Japan economic, political, and cultural ties. Her speech to the combined Japanese and Philippine media in Akasaka Palace gave a comprehensive report on the gains achieved by her visit: "I can confidently say that Japan stands ready to help us, even more than she has done in the past. We are confident that assistance, in the forms of credits and grants-in-aid could reach at least Y100 billion. This represents a significant increase from the Y49.5 billion she normally extended in the past. This assistance package includes the Calaca Power Project Financing, the 14th Yen Loan, as well as specific projects in the form of technical assistance and the transfer of knowhow, especially in agriculture at which Japan has excelled, as well as a much needed infusion of funds to our rural employment program".

Her second visit to Japan, February 1989, was at the height of winter. Together with other world leaders, she attended the necrological services for Emperor Showa (Hirohito).

Her third and last visit was severely criticized by the local media. The importance and significance of the visit was questioned as it came at a time when the Philippines was just recovering from the attempted December 1, 1989 coup and the killer earthquake.

The President's visit, however, was imperative. Together with 65 other heads of state and government, she attended the enthronement ceremonies for Emperor Akihito. But unlike the others, President Aquino managed to make her visit to Japan extend beyond the ceremonial – she conducted one-on-one meetings with other heads of state and government in an effort to generate much needed support and assistance for the country.

Upon her return, the President immediately reported to the people the result of her visit: " . . . in providing us earthquake relief in the form of a \$200 million emergency loan, in considering a \$27 million non-grant project assistance this year and additional assistance to help us overcome the adverse effects of the Middle East crisis, and in considering our request for the early release of the 17th Yen Loan Package, Japan's eminent purpose is the buttressing of our newly restored democracy . . . I was reassured by important investors of their decision to come and join our industrial program . . . I informed Vice-President Quayle of the United States of the satisfaction of our government with the progress of the Philippine-American cooperation talks . . . I am, therefore, happy to be able to report to our countrymen that our trip achieved for our nation positive exposure and a quickening of the pace of development assistance".

This substantially answered the criticisms hurled at her visit.

### **Negara Brunei Darussalam: A New Friend**

Sultan Hajji Hassanal Bolkiah of Negara Brunei Darussalam had to reiterate twice his formal invitation to President Aquino to conduct a state visit to his



country before the latter could finally accede to his request. Hence, President Aquino's visit to Brunei from August 29 to 31, 1987 was a much-awaited event in Southeast Asia's smallest but richest nation.

President Aquino's first visit to Brunei succeeded in establishing a strong bond of friendship and cooperation between the two countries which, at the outset, were to be translated into concrete economic gains and, later on, further strengthened by a second visit.

The program of activities on her first visit included meetings with government officials and businessmen from Brunei as well as the Filipino community. These meetings resulted in the signing of a 15-point joint 'communique' to facilitate the expansion of trade, communication, and construction between the two countries. There was also an agreement which provided for the opening of a direct shipping route. More importantly, the President's visit paved the way for the involvement and substantial contribution of Brunei to the Philippine Assistance Program (PAP).

President Aquino visited Brunei once again on August 2, 1989, on the occasion of the coming of age of the Crown Prince of Brunei (Berkhatan rites). It was an occasion to renew her ties with Sultan Bolkiah who had, by then, already visited the Philippines. The friendship between the two national leaders had transcended the purely official relation and had become one of a personal bond. Such was the friendship that not only was President Aquino a most sought-after guest of the Sultan, invitations were extended to other members of her family as well.

### **China: Sentimental Journey**

During the President's visit to China in April 1988, she also managed to include a stopover at Hong Jian, Xiamen from where she traces her roots. In visiting this village, the President displayed a facet of her human character – her longing to trace her ancestry. Just as she was eager to meet her blood brothers, they were eager and proud to claim her as their kin. Pasted on the wall of one of

the houses she visited in the village was a xerox copy of the Time magazine cover featuring her.

It would probably not be presumptuous to conclude then that the Chinese, known for being shrewd and inscrutable negotiators, gave more than an inch of opening to their "sister".

But the reason for the President's trip was not merely a sentimental one. The Philippines has deep cultural, historical, and economic ties with China. And it is, after all, a major country in the region.

The gains achieved by the President in China included the signing of a Trade Protocol for increased trade between the two countries which provided for the importation by China of several Philippine products ranging from fruits to chemicals. The Chinese government also provided food aid to the Philippines in the form of rice worth US\$300 million.

But the most important agreement reached by the President with Premier Li Peng of China was the promise by the latter that their government would henceforth cease any form of communication or assistance to the Communist Party of the Philippines. The Aquino administration thus gained additional points in its anti-insurgency campaign in the countryside.

### **Hongkong: Tapping Opportunities**

In tandem with her visit to mainland China, the President went on a short visit to Hongkong on a two-fold mission: to encourage Hongkong businessmen to invest in the Philippines; and, to touch base with the Filipino community.

In her address to the Hongkong business community she extended an invitation to its members to invest in the Philippines and join the country in its journey towards progress. She also praised the Filipino community lavishly for their determination to assist their families and their country by working in a foreign land. She also opened the Filipino Social Center in Hongkong to serve as

a recreational and social facility for her countrymen. The President's visit once again conveyed to Filipinos working abroad the deep gratitude of her administration for their contribution to the Philippine economy.

### Switzerland: A Moral Quest

The Philippines had maintained cordial and active relations with Switzerland since 1956. But never had Switzerland's support for democracy in the Philippines been more pronounced than in 1986, when it recognized the Aquino government and ordered the freezing of Marcos' funds in Swiss banks even before a request could be made by the Philippine government.

Since then, Swiss authorities had consistently been cooperative and supportive in providing legal assistance to the Philippines in its court cases involving the hidden wealth, believed to have been deposited in Swiss banks, of the Marcoses and their cronies.

Switzerland is also one of the top European investors in the Philippines.

The President and her party arrived in Geneva, Switzerland on the evening of June 13, 1988. Her arrival had generated a fair measure of expectation and excitement in Switzerland. As home of the European Headquarters of the United Nations, Geneva was the center for world political forums. It housed the central office of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and was the venue of the International Labor Organization Conference.

The themes of the President's speeches in Geneva centered on freedom and democracy. Her first address was before the 75th Annual Conference of the International Labor Organization (ILO). President Aquino was the first lady chief of state to address the distinguished conference. The invitation to do so was handcarried to Manila by ILO Director Francis Blanchard during his visit to the Philippines in March of the same year.

Because of the popularity of President Aquino, invitations to the 75th ILO Conference were in wide demand. For the first time, the 2,000-seat hall could not



admit all the attendees. Officials had to open an adjacent room where 500 more visitors could watch the President on a giant screen. The entry of President Aquino to the Salle Des Assemblies was received with a standing ovation.

Her speech, which enumerated her administration's accomplishments in terms of protecting and upholding the rights and freedom of every Filipino, was rewarded with an applause that lasted for 45 seconds. After her speech, the President was escorted to a private office where she met with ILO officials.

The President, however, was not the only Filipino to address the ILO convention. Crispin Beltran, head of the Kilusang Mayo Uno, had also gone to Geneva with the hope of rousing sympathy and support for their leftist radical group. However, ILO officials gave exclusive prominence and attention to the President. This, in itself, was a tacit rebuke of the leftist cause and a show of approval for the conservative labor policies of the Aquino government.

From the ILO Conference, President Aquino proceeded to the ICRC Headquarters where Red Cross President Cornelio Sommaruga extended a warm welcome to the Philippine delegation. He congratulated the President on her unwavering support for the Red Cross. He thanked her, too, for the facilities and cooperation extended to the Red Cross and for the freedom they had been given to move in and out of jails and counterinsurgency fronts throughout the country. He also said that he wished all other countries were as supportive and open as the Philippines.

The President ended her first morning in Geneva with a luncheon hosted by ILO President Blanchard and other officials of the Labor Convention.

While the President and her official delegation were having lunch, Filipinos from all over Switzerland were beginning to arrive at the Intercontinental Hotel. Some had come by bus, others by train from as far away as Zurich, Loussanne, Frobourg, and Berne. Some were employees of multinational organizations like the UN and the Red Cross; others were domestics; still others were housewives married to Swiss nationals. Most came in yellow dresses, or yellow Cory t-shirts

ordered from the Philippines months before. Everyone came with a photo, hopefully to be signed by the President.

The air of excitement and pride brought back memories of the snap election days or the EDSA victory celebrations. For Filipinos in Switzerland, the fervor inspired by the revolution had not yet died. When the President finally arrived, the jampacked hall burst into cheers and chants. The crowd of over 800 sang a lusty version of "Tie a Yellow Ribbon". The President beamed and thanked the audience for doing their part in the nation's economic recovery program.

After the reunion with Filipinos, the President proceeded to her hotel suite where she met with officials from Nestle who pledged to invest an additional US\$50 million in their ventures in the Philippines. In the evening, she joined the World Economic Forum to speak on the political and economic foundations for Philippine growth.

On the second day of her Swiss visit, the President and her party traveled by land to the Swiss capital of Berne. The President savored the scenery along the way: "Nasabi sa akin noong advance party, ang ganda raw ng scenery on the drive from Geneva to Berne. So, naisipan ko na ako na lamang mag-isa ang sasakay doon sa auto. It was just such a beautiful scenery yung para bang ang impression mo tahimik at ang linis . . . ." (Magtanong sa Pangulo, June 26, 1988)

The President arrived at the Hotel Bellevue Palace at 9:30 in the morning and was warmly received by government leaders of the capital and a small but extremely nationalistic group of Filipinos who had waited for hours for a glimpse of her. President Aquino invited them to her Presidential suite at the end of the day to the delight and amazement of the Swiss Police, "When I got there . . . there were a few Filipinos outside the hotel; then in the afternoon, they were still there. Tapos sinabi sa akin nung isang security, 'Naku Ma'm, kanina pa hong umaga iyang mga kababayan natin d'yan'. Sabi ko, 'O bakit, ano daw ang gusto?' 'Wala ho, gusto lamang ho kayong makita at makausap' . . . . So, sinabi ko dahil . . . I had a few minutes, so I told my security, 'Sige papanhikin na lamang ninyo dito sa kuwarte ko'. So they came up and I said, 'Naku, salamat naman sa pagtitiyaga ninyo diyan at nakatayo kayo at naghintay kayo para sa akin'. Kasama

rin nila iyong kanilang mga anak. So sinabi ko, 'Kung gusto ninyo, magkuhaan tayo ng litrato.' Sabi nila, gusto nga raw nila noon, okey naman daw. I told them that I was really very happy to see them'''. (Magtanong sa Pangulo, June 26, 1988)

The President and Federal Counsellor Rene Felber also had a confidential exchange in the Counsellor's Office at the Foreign Affairs Department. After the one-on-one meeting, an official Swiss Delegation led by Felber sat for a marathon working session with the President and her official delegation. Talk centered on the welfare of 7,000 Filipinos working all over Switzerland. The group also forged an agreement that would promote and protect trade and investments between the Swiss Confederation and the Philippine Republic for the next 10 years. The agreement entailed the protection of both parties from the expropriation or nationalization of their assets.

The working session was followed by a working lunch with the Swiss President where the Memorandum of Understanding providing for a SF60 million mixed credit facility for the Philippines was signed.

But the most notable gain achieved by the President's visit was the commitment of the Swiss government for assistance in the retrieval of the wealth stashed by the deposed dictator and his cronies in several Swiss banks.

### **Italy: Advocating Human Rights**

Italy was the staunchest political and economic ally of the Philippines in Europe. It was the first European country to recognize the Aquino government and was the most generous European economic benefactor of the country, providing the largest development assistance to the Aquino government through the first RP-Italy Protocol of Understanding. This Protocol of Understanding which included a development cooperation program amounting to US\$270 million in grants and highly concessional loans, was an important product of President Aquino's state visit to Italy on June 16-17, 1988.

President Aquino was fetched by a plane from Cointrin Airport in Geneva by the Italian government as an act of courtesy to their much-awaited guest. The

welcome given to the President at the Champino International Airport was vastly different from that she had received in Geneva.

Where the Swiss were formal, polite, and restrained, the Italians by contrast were dramatic, expressive, and as sunny as their climate. Hence, at the spacious courtyard of Quirinale Palace, official residence of the Italian Government, a mounted cavalry of 23 gold-crested horsemen lined up to escort President Aquino. Meanwhile, a battalion of grenadiers or foot soldiers prepared to salute her as she passed.

While President Aquino was having lunch with President Cossiga, thousands of Filipinos had already begun to congregate at a giant sports arena called the Palazetto Dello Sport. The cavernous stadium, which was the site of the 1960 Olympics, acquired the air of a Philippine fiesta as thousands of homesick Filipinos, who had traveled from far-off cities and towns, gathered to catch a glimpse of President Aquino. When the President finally arrived at 3:30 p.m., the stadium echoed with cheers.

The program was distinctly Filipino. The President was regaled with songs like "Bayan Ko", "Hindi Kita Malilimutan", and "Pilipinas Kong Mahal" and a Muslim dance number. In turn, Kris, the President's youngest daughter, offered a song for the audience. At the end of the program, the President was presented with bouquets of yellow flowers by the different Filipino associations in Italy and a marble bust of Ninoy Aquino made by Tomas Concepcion. The grand reunion ended with a speech from the President delivered extemporaneously in Tagalog which was well-applauded by the crowd.

The President then returned to Quirinale Palace for the Cercle Diplomatic Presentation of the Diplomatic Corps. This meeting was an event much awaited by the foreign ambassadors and their wives. It was said that the wives clamored for the audience with the heroine of the Philippine revolution long before plans for the visit had been finalized. After the introductions, a photo session with President Cossiga was held at the reception room.

At the end of the elaborate ceremony, the two Presidents settled down for serious discussions on affairs of state.



On her second day, the President, together with Italian Defense Minister Vittorio Zandoni, visited the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Piazza Venezia for the formal wreath-laying ceremonies. The Piazza was closed to traffic and was surrounded by platoons from all of Italy's defense branches. The ceremony was another display of Italy's passionate nature.

From the Piazza, the President proceeded to the Campidoglio or the City Hall of Rome where she was introduced to the members of the municipal government and was requested to sign the golden book of distinguished guests. After a short ceremony, the President had a private talk with Mayor Signorello of Rome.

After the courtesy visit, the President proceeded to Villa Madama for one of the most important functions of her second working day. The Villa Madama talks resulted in the signing of nine separate bilateral agreements providing for the extension of US\$188 million in new loans and grants by the Italian government for several infrastructure and development projects in the Philippines.

After the extremely productive session, the President moved on to meet with private industry leaders from all over Italy and Europe to request for increased technical assistance and technology transfer to the Philippines as well as support and cooperation in settling outstanding issues with the European Economic Community.

Her departure from Italy was again marked with pomp and ceremony. The red carpet was rolled out and mounted cavalry and grenadiers lined the exit of the courtyard of Quirinale Palace. President Cossiga himself escorted the President to her limousine.

### **Vatican City: Pilgrimage For Peace**

The State of Vatican City (Stato della Citta del Vaticano), headed by the Pope, is the seat of the Papacy. President Aquino, as a symbol of freedom and democracy, and the Holy Father, as the world's spiritual leader, were linked not only by their faith but also by a common commitment to promote peace, justice,

and the full development of man. The visit may be called a "summit meeting" between two significant and prominent leaders. Cardinal-Archbishop Karol Wojtyla and President Corazon C. Aquino were both recognized as trailblazers, establishing many "firsts" in their respective careers.

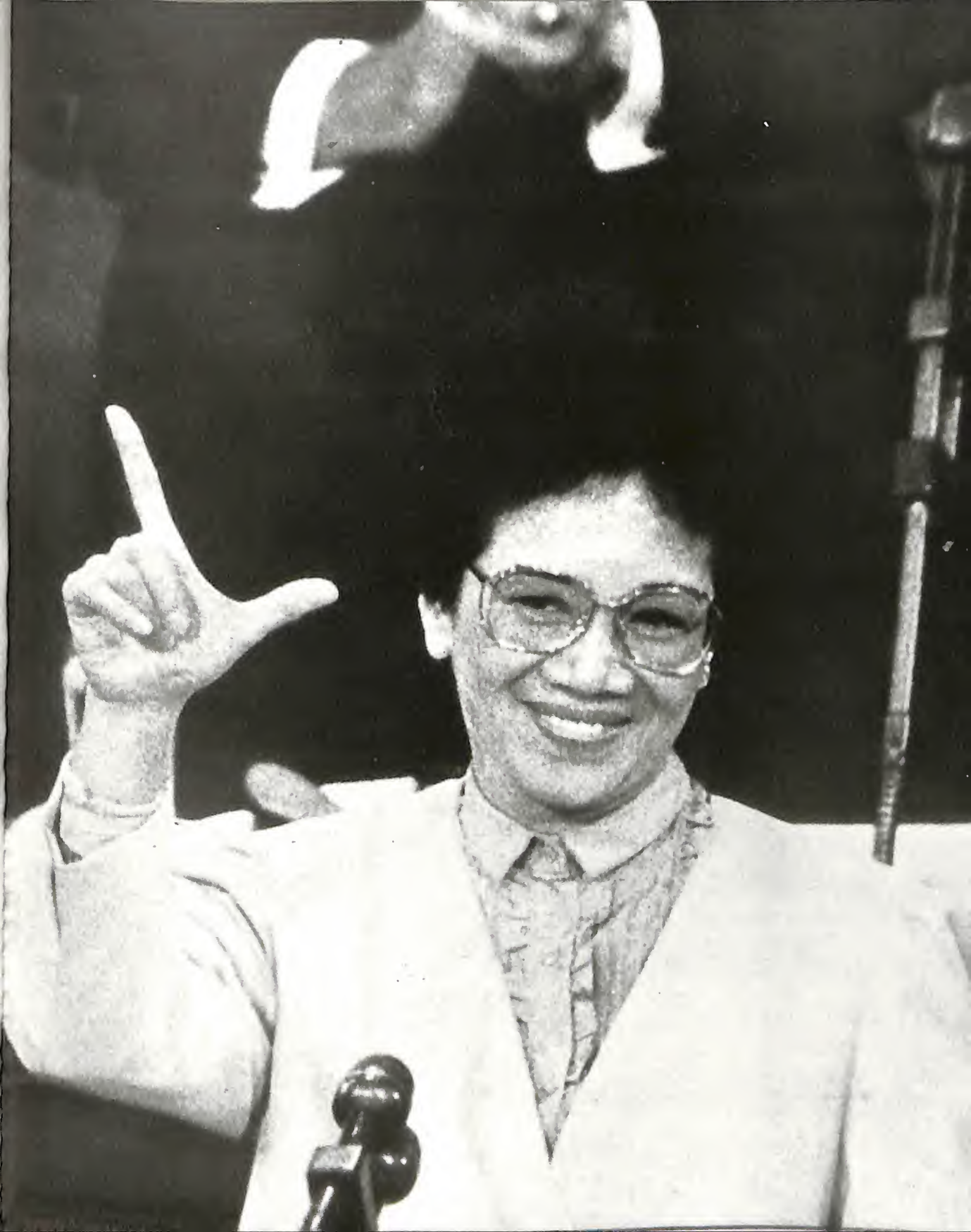
Pope John Paul II is the first non-Italian Pope since 1523, the first Polish Pope in the Church's history, and the youngest Pope since 1878. President Corazon C. Aquino is the first woman President of the Philippines and in the entire South-east Asian Region, and the first Asian leader to lead a successful people-powered revolt against a well-entrenched dictator.

The President first visited Vatican City early in the morning of June 17, 1988. It was a very special event for the President as she had to quietly leave Quirinale Palace with Kris and three security aides to enter Vatican City as a private citizen. She had to shed her official identity for a private mass with Pope John Paul II. The unscheduled mass said by the Pope was an unprecedented event in Vatican history. The Pontiff did not, by tradition, conduct masses for visiting heads of state. All presidents and royalties who have had the honor to attend his masses had done so as among the regular churchgoers. The Pope, however, gave preferential attention to the President as he recognized her as a devout Catholic for whom he had only the highest regard. But President Aquino's shedding of public status for a few hours (as she was still on official visit to Italy) to attend the Holy Mass gave Vatican Protocol Officials a very thin line to work with.

At his personal chapel in the Vatican, Pope John Paul II said the service assisted by 12 Filipino priests. After the private mass, the Pope escorted Mrs. Aquino all the way to the door, another personal gesture he did not usually extend. And after a long handclasp, he said his good-bye. Afterwards, Corazon C. Aquino had to return to Quirinale Palace to resume her functions as Philippine President.

The official visit of the President to Vatican City, on the other hand, began on the morning of June 18, 1988. Like the Italian government, the Vatican state gave the President a lavish formal welcome.







**'Woman of the Year'**

*Preceding page:*

**President Aquino flashing the Laban sign before the US Congress.**

Church bells pealed to signal the approach of the President and her official delegation. They were received at the Cortile San Damaso, the inner courtyard of the Palazzia Costolico which is the nerve center of the Vatican, by Bishop Dino Monducci and a number of Vatican dignitaries. Swiss guards stood in formation to receive and escort the Presidential party to the Sala Clementina to meet the Vatican dignitaries while the President was ushered into the Sala del Tronetto which is the private hall where new Popes, by tradition, are chosen and announced to the public. Here, she was received by Pope John Paul II, with whom she sat down for a one-on-one talk.

After meeting with the Pope, the President and her official delegation were ushered into the office of Julio Cardinal Casarolli, Vatican Secretary of State. After short talks, the Philippine delegation was introduced to the diplomatic corps of the Vatican. The usually sedate body was enthusiastic in its greetings to President Aquino. After the ceremonial introductions, the President received a blessing from Cardinal Casarolli before entering the Basilica to offer a short prayer. On one of the walls of the Basilica, Vatican artisans had labored to complete an image of San Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino saint, just in time for the President's visit.

Back at the Grand Hotel, President Aquino hosted a luncheon for Cardinal Casarolli, as the Pope, by tradition, never attends socials outside of the Vatican and it was his Secretary of State who accepted on his behalf. Again, the attendance of the Roman Curia was unprecedented in this event.

In the afternoon, the President paid a brief visit to the Pontificio Colegio Filipino, a seminary for Filipino priests and nuns, and received a medal for her stand on human rights from the members of the Christian Democratic Party.

The reception given to Corazon C. Aquino during her visit to Vatican City as a private citizen and as the President of the Republic showed the high regard the Roman Catholic Church had for the Philippine heroine who had led a successful non-violent revolution.



### **Thailand: A Handclasp for ASEAN Brotherhood**

Thailand was but a stopover of President Aquino on the return flight from Rome to Manila. Despite the limited time available, the President made the most of the stopover by meeting with Thai Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda to discuss matters pertinent to the welfare and development of the ASEAN region. During the meeting, the President also personally offered her apologies for the cancellation of her state visit to Thailand in 1987.

The visit highlighted President Aquino's penchant for maximizing every opportunity to strengthen relations between the Philippines and other nations.

### **Federal Republic Of Germany: Sharing Restored Democracy**

The President's visit to the Republic of Germany coincided with their celebration of their 40th year as a democratic country and the proclamation of its basic law, the equivalent of the Philippine Constitution. Fate must have willed this coincidence as there were many parallelisms between the Philippines and Germany.

Both countries had suffered under dictatorships, which spurred their determination to start anew as free and democratic states founded on the rule of law and the supremacy of the people's will.

The President and her official delegation arrived at the Bonn-Cologne Airport on July 9, 1989 on an unusually chilly and rainy morning. The excitement and enthusiasm generated by their arrival, however, was effusive enough to warm the hearts of the President and her team. In a rare display of hospitality, the German government broke protocol by setting aside restrictions on noise pollution in order to welcome the delegation with a 21-gun salute.

A crowd of Filipinos had also gathered at the airport to catch a glimpse of the President. The Filipino crowd, who withstood the freezing weather and rain, immediately broke into cheers at the President's arrival. After the welcome cer-

emony, the President broke through the security cordon to shake hands with her countrymen, some of whom were in tears.

In Germany, the President visited Berlin where she was received by Mayor Walter Momper and his wife and the Allied Commanders of England, the United States of America, and France. From the Berlin-Tegel Airport, she proceeded by motorcade to the Berlin townhall or Rathaus Schöneberg where hundreds of Filipinos awaited her arrival. At the townhall, the President signed the golden book previously autographed by other colorful political names such as President John Kennedy and Queen Elizabeth. She also exchanged messages with Mayor Momper before a crowd composed of largely Berlin-based Filipinos.

Afterwards, the President proceeded to the Reichstag building or the old German Parliament where she found an opportunity to address, for the first time, one of the burning issues that confronted her government: human rights. This issue was to face her several times in her visit to Europe.

Prior to President Aquino's visit, the Communist Party of the Philippines had launched a smear campaign against the Aquino administration. Taking advantage of the German sensitivity to the human rights issue, the CPP-NDF campaigned that the Aquino government was condoning massive and systematic human rights violations. The President's assurances of the continued protection by her administration of human rights in the Philippines must have allayed the doubts of her German audience. The German government extended a development assistance package of DM110 million to the Philippines. This, despite the fact that the human rights record of a country was one of the main considerations in the granting of development assistance by Germany.

Later in the afternoon, the President flew by helicopter to the City of Aachen where she was joyfully greeted by thousands of Filipinos who had been waiting for hours for her arrival. At the Aachen Rathaus Auditorium, the President encouraged the cheering Filipino audience to maintain the good name and reputation of Filipinos in Europe as being capable and industrious.

On July 10, President Aquino's visit to the Federal Republic of Germany officially began at the Villa Hammerschmidt where she trooped the line of Ger-

man soldiers with West German President Richard von Weizsaecker. Private talks were afterwards held between President Aquino and President Weizsaecker.

From the Villa Hammerschmidt, President Aquino proceeded to the Rathaus or townhall of Bonn where she met with Bonn Lord Mayor Hans Daniels. The President once again broke protocol to greet Filipino well-wishers who had gathered outside the townhall and were singing "I'll Be Seeing You".

Later, President Aquino laid a wreath at the North Cemetery which was the monument for the victims of war and tyranny. The solemnity of the moment was heightened by the playing of the "Lied von Guten Kameraden", a song that calls for the laying down of arms and the keeping of peace.

The President also met with the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry to campaign for the correction of the trade imbalance between the two countries through increased importation of Philippine products to Germany. The President also met with Social Democratic Party Chairman Jochen Vogel and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of the Free Democratic Party.

In the evening, President Aquino attended a formal banquet with President Weizsaecker and 300 German luminaries from the fields of politics, culture, and the arts at the Schloss Augustusburg.

The President's third day in Germany began on a triumphant note. Over breakfast, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Vice-Chancellor Juergen Warnke informed her of their development assistance package of DM110 million for the Philippines. During the day, she also met with the leaders of the Green Party, the third political faction to touch base with the President, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

The President's visit to Germany ended with farewell rites at the Villa Hammerschmidt hosted by President Weizsaecker.

The President's visit to Germany had successfully dispelled the rumors of widespread human rights abuse in the Philippines and had reinforced the country's image as the cradle of democracy in Southeast Asia.



## France: A Symbolic Meeting

If there is anything Frenchmen and Filipinos share, it is their pride in their unique revolution and in the democratic society they now enjoy as a result. For this reason, in 1989, President Aquino was bestowed the singular honor of being the only state visitor among the select heads of state and government invited to attend the Bicentennial Celebration of the Fall of Bastille. President Francois Mitterand had personally extended this invitation to President Aquino.

This rare honor was given prominence along the Champs Elysee where the Philippine flag was flown alongside the French tricolor during the peak of the celebrations.

The President was personally met by President Mitterand and his wife at the Orly Airport. From there, they flew by helicopter to the Esplanades des Invalides fronting the mausoleum of Napoleon Bonaparte. Here, the motorcade to the State Guesthouse, the Hotel Marigny, began.

Hundreds of French Republic Guards on horseback were a magnificent sight to behold as they cantered forward, blowing on trumpets as they escorted President Aquino to the State Guesthouse. All roads leading to Marigny were closed to traffic to accommodate the Presidential entourage. In simple ceremonies, President and Mrs. Mitterand and President Aquino exchanged gifts and pleasantries.

Later at the Elysees Palace, the President was feted in a state banquet hosted by President Mitterand. It was during this important occasion that the latter verbalized the value the French people and government accorded to President Aquino as a guest of honor: "In the heart of a year devoted to the commemoration of the Bicentenary of the French Revolution, this week is, for us French, somewhat exceptional as it is the week of the 14th of July, our National Holiday. I wanted to invite, for this occasion, a few of those people who are working to create a more just and more generous world in the spirit of the universal values of human rights and democracy that France proposed to the world in 1789. It is only fitting, Madam President, that with this state visit with which you honour us, you should be the first to arrive at this gathering of the friends of France".

The second day of President Aquino in France began with a meeting with French business leaders to discuss investment prospects in the Philippines. Afterwards, she visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and proceeded to the reception tendered in her honor by Mayor Jacques Chirac of Paris at the Hotel de Ville.

The highlight of the day was the luncheon hosted by the Conseil National du Patronat Francais and her meetings with French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas and Prime Minister Michel Rocard. Before the Patronat, the President underscored the economic gains made by her country and assured her audience that the political, social, and economic situation was ripe for joint ventures and new trade opportunities with French businessmen. During the meeting with Minister Dumas, President Aquino witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding which provided for the extension of social security to some 12,000 to 15,000 Filipinos working in France.

During a press conference at the Hotel Marigny, the President announced the signing and exchange of letters specifying the extension of FRF1.0 billion in official development assistance from France to the Philippines over a period of four years. Her day finally ended with a dinner hosted by Prime Minister Rocard at the Foreign Affairs Palace where she was repeatedly praised for her role in the bloodless revolution that restored democracy in the Philippines.

President Aquino was among 46 other chiefs of state who attended the many ceremonies to commemorate the French Bicentennial. Even among this crowd of world luminaries, the President stood out, being very much applauded and cheered.

As was her wont, President Aquino made the most of her time and the opportunity by meeting with several world leaders present during the celebrations. The President met with Prime Ministers Brian Mulroney of Canada, Rajiv Gandhi of India, Sosuke Uno of Japan and President Hosni Murabak of Egypt. The President also took time to meet with UNESCO officials and six honorary Filipino consuls as well as the Filipino community in France.

The timing of President Aquino's visit was most opportune as she was able to ensure the support of France in the meeting of the world's economic powers,

the Group of Seven (G-7), which was to be held in France after the Bicentennial Celebration.

### **Belgium: A Friendly Call**

As a gesture of appreciation for the open and sincere support expressed by King Badouin I and Prime Minister Wilfried Martens during the early days of her administration, the President accepted the invitation of the King to pay a private visit to the Kingdom of Belgium. The visit was the last leg of her tour of Europe. From Germany, she proceeded to France, and from France she moved on to Belgium.

President Aquino was received at the Melsbrock Military Airport by King Badouin and together they rode to Laeken Palace, the residence of the Royal Couple. At the Palace, they were joined by Queen Fabiola and Prime Minister Martens for private discussions.

Though President Aquino's visit to Belgium was supposed to have been a private one, substantial gains were achieved in terms of the signing of a Financing Memorandum of ECU10.4 million for Agricultural Education and the Memorandum of Understanding for European Commission assistance for the rural development program of the Philippines' Department of Agriculture.

The President was also able to convince the European Community (EC) to open an EC Delegation Office (which is equivalent to an Embassy) in Manila. But the more important gain achieved by this visit to Belgium was the establishment of goodwill between Belgium and the Philippines.

### **Canada: Broadening Avenues Of Friendship**

In contrast to its lukewarm relations with the Philippines during the previous administration, Canada manifested strong support and admiration for the Aquino government. In 1986, the Canadian ambassador was the first to present

his credentials to the new administration. President Aquino has the distinction of being the first Philippine President to make a state visit to Canada.

The level of excitement in Canada over President Aquino's visit was at a high gear. Months before her arrival, television documentaries on the EDSA revolution were already being viewed on Canadian television and newspaper accounts regularly contained feature stories on the Philippines and the miracle that was people power. It was said that the only visits that could rival it were those of the Queen of England and the Prince and Princess of Wales.

The first stop of President Aquino was Vancouver, where she met with the members of the Filipino-Canadian community and the Vancouver businessmen. During these meetings, she invited them to consider the Philippines as a viable area for investment. In addition to her invitation to invest in the country, she also shared her pride and joy with the Filipino-Canadian community in having been accorded the honor of being the first Philippine president invited to Canada: "I am privileged to be the first Philippine president to visit Canada. And I am very happy to share this privileged moment with my fellow Filipinos . . . . Hindi po kaila na handa kayong tumugon sa napapanahong hamon sa pagpapaunlad ng ating bansa. Kaya't nais ko pong pagtibayin ang inyong pagmamalasakit sa ating mga kababayan, at ang inyong pagnanasang tumulong sa kaunlaran at kasaganaan ng ating bayan . . . . Sa tulong ninyo at sa aming pagsusumikap, darating ang panahon na buong karangalang ihahayag natin ang ating sariling kasaganaan bilang isang bansa".

From Vancouver, the President proceeded to Toronto where she heard mass celebrated especially for her at St. Michael's Cathedral and attended a dinner hosted by Premier David Peterson.

On November 6, 1989, the President was given a 21-gun salute in Ottawa as she trooped the line of the Royal 22nd Regiment in their elegant red and black uniforms. The Queen's representative and Canada's Head of State, Madame Jeanne Suave, accorded President Aquino a warm and stirring welcome: "I greet you with great joy and, on behalf of all Canadians, I wish you the warmest of welcomes. You arrive here preceded by the renown of your outstanding qualities



and your accomplishments since the moment when, in dramatic circumstances, you rallied the defenders of democracy . . . . I cannot conceal my feelings of affection – feelings that I now convey to you in all simplicity. You embody an ideal of human solidarity that your presence here today brings home to us in a very special way".

In Ottawa, the President met with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and other Canadian government leaders. As a result, Prime Minister Mulroney pledged CA \$100 million in new aid to the Philippines, over and above the CA \$100 million previously made available for the five-year country assistance program.

A memorandum of understanding which aimed to strengthen quality control of tuna and shrimps from the Philippines and facilitate their export to Canada was also signed. An Extradition Treaty was also forged. In response to President Aquino's appeal, Prime Minister Mulroney also promised to intercede for the Philippines for debt relief with the World Bank, IMF, and other G-7 creditor nations.

The President's visit to Canada was a resounding success not only because of the groundbreaking agreements reached, but more so because of the unabashed admiration that the Canadian government and people showed her. This helped ensure the Canadian government's openness to extend assistance asked of them by President Aquino.

### **Singapore: Cementing ASEAN Ties**

The President capped her international sojourn with her participation in the Fourth Meeting of the ASEAN Heads of Government in Singapore in Jan. 26-28, 1992. The Fourth ASEAN Summit, as it is more popularly known, served as a fitting venue for the valedictory address of the President to the other ASEAN heads of government.

Aside from her participation in the summit, the President was also prevailed upon by the other ASEAN heads of government to meet with them as they

were all well aware that this would be the last time she would represent her country. Each one of them took the opportunity to bid her good-bye. President Aquino had informal bilateral meetings with the five ASEAN-member heads of state and Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore as well as Prime Minister Habbie Namelli of Papua New Guinea. Her meeting with Lee Kuan Yew was specifically requested for by the latter as he was one of the earliest ASEAN leaders to have welcomed President Aquino into the ASEAN family. Namelli, on the other hand, wanted to meet the President not only to say good-bye, but to express his gratitude as she was one of those actively involved in the campaign to have his country included in the ASEAN.

The President, once again, gave priority to meeting her countrymen abroad. She met the Filipinos in Singapore at the TOA Payoh Sports Hall in the afternoon and had cocktails with the Filipino Business Executives Group in the evening. In each of these occasions, she reminded her countrymen of the government's concern for their well-being and extolled them for the success they have achieved in another land. She also urged them to support each other in a land where they were a minority.

It is a striking coincidence that the President would deliver her swan song as the Philippines' foremost ambassador of goodwill in Singapore, where she also had her baptism as an international statesman when she visited in 1986. This fact also underscored the President's strong commitment to making the Philippines an active player in the ASEAN region.

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# Special Action Group

THE SUCCESS AND orderly conclusion of the President's trips would not have been possible if she did not have efficient assistance and support. For this, credit must be given to a special operations group – men and women handpicked by the President to attend to the complicated task of overseeing her foreign travels.

At the early stage, from 1987 to 1989, the leader of this team was then Cabinet Secretary Jose 'Ping' de Jesus. Ping effectively managed the President's state visits by thoroughly preparing all technical and substantial aspects of the trip well ahead of time.

When Ping was designated Presidential Coordinating Secretary in 1988, his responsibilities with regard to Presidential state visits were transferred to his protege, Aniceto 'Chito' Sobrepeña. There was no difficulty in the turnover since Chito, then Cabinet Undersecretary, had previously assisted Ping in this task and had essentially the same management style as his mentor.

The other members of the special operations group were Col. Voltaire 'Volts' Gazmin of the Presidential Security Group (PSG), Radio Television Malacañang (RTVM) Executive Director Maria Montelibano (who represented the Office of the Press Secretary), and Miguel Perez Rubio from the Protocol Office (later re-

placed by Ambassador Sergio 'Serge' Barrera). The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) was also a part of the group – but the personalities differed for every region or country to be visited because each destination required a different area of diplomatic expertise.

Each member of the group had his or her specialization: Maria was in charge of coordinating with local and foreign media for coverage of the trips; Volts provided all the security arrangements; Ambassadors Perez Rubio and Barrera attended to all protocolar details; and Ping and Chito orchestrated everything.

The DFA and other concerned government agencies, on the other hand, were responsible for the conduct of ministerial and sub-ministerial meetings with their foreign counterparts. Specific bilateral issues for the enhancement of economic, political, and social relations with the country to be visited were taken up six to four months before the visit. It was during these meetings where agreements or memoranda of understanding were formulated, drafted, fine-tuned, and submitted to the respective heads of government for approval. It was during this stage that the actual negotiations took place.

The special operations group was privy to the basic rules that President Aquino imposed for the preparation of state visits. She required strict adherence to these unwritten, but enforced, rules.

*Rule number 1* was that state visits should be carried out with the least cost possible. Because of this rule, the budgets for the visits were always presented to the President herself for approval. More often than not, initial submissions were returned with the instruction to further reduce cost.

The cost-cutting had gotten to a point where, during the European visit, the crew from RTVM cooked tinned food in their hotel room on a portable stove they had brought specifically for the purpose. Because cooking and eating in the hotel rooms were disallowed by the management, these cooking sessions were conducted like the most serious of undercover operations. Since they were embarrassed to be discovered by the hotel management, the crew placed all the empty cans in bags which they disposed elsewhere so that these would not be found in



the hotel trash. As is the usual procedure when crossing the border, they would be questioned by the patrol guards as to the contents of their bags. The standard reply was: "Equipment". It was only after having successfully crossed the border that the RTVM crew would breathe a sigh of relief for not having been inspected. It would have been difficult for them to explain why such bags contained Third World trash.

But if austerity was imposed on all, the President herself set the example. She had been observed to wear the same dress throughout a day despite some changes of location and ceremonies. This she did without losing sight of the appropriate use of her attire, for she changed into dinner gown in the evening - a thing unthinkable to her predecessor.

*Rule number 2* was that, to minimize cost, the President preferred to take regular commercial flights. Out of a total of 16 state visits, she brought her own plane to only three of these: Singapore in 1986, China and Brunei in 1988. The only reason President Aquino was persuaded to take her own plane was when she was informed that the flight would have to be delayed a few hours so as to accommodate her schedule. Since this would have meant inconvenience to the other passengers, President Aquino relented and brought her plane.

For the PSG, the President's preference for taking commercial flights was an added burden to their security concerns. It meant there would be other passengers on the same plane that they would have to monitor.

During the state visits, President Aquino brought along one member of her family as well as her own hairdresser. But unlike the previous administration, she shouldered the expenses of the two. Even the cash advance which was usually provided her during the visits were returned intact when they got back. The President always used her own money for her purchases. Not a single centavo was charged to official expense.

This is not to say that President Aquino ever had time to go shopping during her state visits. It was said that unlike other heads of state who try to put in some work into their leisure while on state visits, she hardly had any leisure to

put into her work schedule. She always made it a point to ensure that her time would be maximized. That was *rule number 3*.

Her average program of activities for the state visits showed that President Aquino attended as much as five official functions in a day. Once, during a briefing on the proposed scenario for a state visit, President Aquino teasingly commented: "Si Chito, ayaw yata ako pagpahingahin". This was when she was informed that her schedule would only allow her to retire for the day at 10:30 p.m.

If the President had barely enough time to rest during her state visits, the support staff barely knew the word sleep during these times. The RTVM crew, after every Presidential engagement, had to edit and prepare the tv presentation to be sent back to the Philippines the same day. The PSG, Protocol Officer and Ping or Chito, on the other hand, had to review and adjust, if necessary, the activities for the following day; conduct the final ocular inspection of the venues; and, attend to the last-minute details.

Contrary to the notion that those who were included as support staff for the state visits were lucky to travel abroad for free, the truth was that they "only saw airports and hotels". Those at home were luckier to have their bosses off their backs.

But there were fringe benefits attached to accompanying the President on her state visits. She always recognized those who were there to support her. For the cameramen, she was always ready with a smile. For the PSG, she was always concerned for their welfare, asking whether they had rested comfortably or had adequate meals. For the DFA staff, she was ready to smile and thank them for their assistance.

The President gave strict instructions that her official delegation should remain "lean and mean". That is, only those officials whose presence were absolutely necessary should accompany her. During the fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore, the Philippine delegation was limited to only 34. The other delegations numbered 72 to 100. During briefings on administrative matters, she would

carefully study the proposed delegation list to ensure that it was kept at a minimum. This was *rule number 4*.

Hence, the PSG was limited to at most 12 per visit. The RTVM crew could number from 8 to 20 depending on the number of venues to be covered. Secretary de Jesus never brought any of his staff along – he attended to all the requirements himself. There were even times when the Protocol Officers would decide not to go especially on those visits which had minimal protocolar activities.

On her trip to Japan in 1989 for the enthronement of Emperor Akihito, RTVM sent only a cameraman. Vic Victoria relates how he had to act as cameraman, vtr man, audio man, and even make-up artist to their annotator, Christine Cunanan - a staffer at the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo who was roped in for the job.

President Aquino also made sure that her scenario for a visit included at least one program with Filipinos living or working in the country to be visited. This was *rule number 5*. She so strongly wanted to reach out to her countrymen abroad that she would even break through her security cordon to shake hands or talk with them. These caused nightmares to the PSG who were tasked with protecting her and providing her a shield from the crowd.

The President was also a stickler for detail. She studied every briefing paper submitted to her and made her own marginal notes which she would discuss during the briefings conducted for her and her official delegation. She never accepted briefing statements at face value.

More often than not, the bilateral issues included the trade imbalance between the Philippines and the host country. She would then often ask Secretary Concepcion, and later, Secretary Garrucho whether the problem may have been caused by the inability of the Philippines to subscribe to the standards of the host country. She also made it a point to ask the Department of Trade and Industry to identify the Philippine products the host country was in need of. She once commented on this matter: "Huwag naman masabing para tayong mga bata na nagrereklamo - let's be prepared to say that there's a trade imbalance between our countries and this is what we propose to do about it". Thus, *rule number 6*



required a thoroughness in her briefings which she herself reviewed, discussed, and took to heart.

This is because she would never have allowed herself to appear to her host country as a mendicant begging for support. In each of her visits, she always managed to keep her country's dignity.

*Rule number 7* was to maintain transparency in all of her activities. Hence, she wanted her countrymen to be appraised of the purpose of her visit even before she left; and she immediately reported on the results as soon as she arrived. Maria, taking a cue from the President, encouraged the local media to cover the President's state visits, although there were serious financial constraints in undertaking the task.

Unlike the previous administration, the Aquino government was always mindful of the enormous expense that foreign travel entailed. Of particular concern was how to manage logistics for a media entourage which, though a necessity in this era of spontaneous global communication, the government could hardly afford. The networks and publication outfits, too, did not have enough resources to finance the coverage of the President's state visits on their own. It is a credit to Maria that she was creative and ingenious enough to think of pooling the resources (fax machines, computers, accommodations, transportation, telephone lines, etc.) for the media. Hence, the President's state visits were well-covered at minimum expense to both the government and the networks and publishers.

*Rule number 8* was for the staff to be well-prepared for the visits down to the littlest detail. President Aquino wanted to be informed of every aspect of the visit, from the administrative to the substantive. She did not want any surprises. Ping and Chito were constantly on their toes trying to determine what possible questions the President may raise. Her calls during the day meant there was an area of inquiry. The staff of Ping and Chito were constantly revising the briefing kits.

These preparations were so meticulous and hectic that it was a common joke among the staff members, who rarely got a chance to go home during the days



prior to a state visit, that their families would be surprised to see them when they finally went home. Some of the staff members, on the other hand, fantasized that they would insert a note in the President's briefing kit to remind her to bring home a *pasalubong* (token) for them. They got energized by the fantasy that upon her return, she would respond to the note by calling the staff member to the Guest House to give the *pasalubong* personally. Of course, that was a long shot since everybody knew the President really hardly shopped on these trips, even for herself.

While the President was abroad, she wanted to be kept well-informed of the goings-on in the country. As a result, Ping established a 24-hour center in his office which was tasked with sending regular updates to the President and her delegation on the various events in the country. This 24-hour center served a dual purpose – not only did it send regular updates, it also provided the necessary information that may suddenly be required by the Philippine delegation.

The staff manning the 24-hour centers learned about rule number 9 the hard way. The President was then on a trip to the US. The delegation suddenly called Manila, and since there was a time lag, at the wee hours of the morning when the staff were asleep. The problem was that the room assignments had not been finalized when the delegation left because the American counterparts had not yet given the list of room allocations. Somehow, immediate follow through on the matter had been overlooked. By the time the confusion was cleared up, the people on both sides of the Pacific had lost their sleep. **Rule number 9**, by the way: never sleep on the job - everyone, from the Philippine delegation to the staff members left behind, had to remain awake and alert.

The President, consistent with her thrust of accountability and transparency in government, wanted a comprehensive documentation of her state visits. Post event reports which gave detailed accounts of the undertaking, from the preparatory stages to the conclusion, were painstakingly prepared by Ping and Chito. **Rule number 10** - the comprehensive reporting of a state visit - thus, gave the President a valuable tool in assessing her foreign sojourns.